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AUTHOR Gifford, Jean
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ABSTRACT

As Australia recognized the need for a better educated and highly trained workforce, national attention focused on secondary and post-secondary education and vocational training, with an emphasis on the acquisition of basic, entry level work skills. Because the foundations for success at this level are laid at an early age, however, the Schools Council sought to address issues of importance to the crucial beginning years of education with a project called The Compulsory Years of Schooling. This report elaborates on some of the issues relevant to the early childhood years in schools. The paper asserts that children five to eight years of age need educational programs that have been specifically designed for them and teachers who have been trained to work with young children. Although the style of teaching throughout primary school is gradually changing, teachers are encouraged to adopt developmentally appropriate practice with their youngest children. The report also proposes that early childhood teacher training should be largely separate from the discipline-oriented primary and secondary teacher education courses, and offer narrower specialization within the early childhood range. Improvement in early childhood education also depends upon the ability of the early childhood field as a whole to find its voice and advocate for good practice in all early childhood programs. Contains approximately 95 references. (TJQ)

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AUSTRALIA

THE COMPULSORY YEARS

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A Stitch in Time

STRENGTHENING THE FIRST YEARS OF SCHOOL

COMMISSIONED REPORT NO. 16

PS 021536

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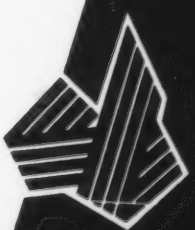

Schools Council

NATIONAL BOARD OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Compulsory Years Project

Titles in the Compulsory Years Series (Stage 1) are:

- The Early Years of Schooling: A Discussion Paper (September 1991);
- A Snapshot of the Early Years of Schooling (January 1992);
- A Stitch in Time: Strengthening the First Years of School (May 1992);
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- Developing Flexible Strategies in the Early Years of Schooling (working title).

Any queries concerning the Compulsory Years Project and publications should be directed to:

Michelle Fitzgerald (06) 276 7342.

Compulsory Years of Schooling Project
Schools Council
National Board of Employment, Education and Training

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Project Paper No. 3

Commissioned Report No. 16

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Foreword

When the Schools Council decided to mount its project on the Compulsory Years it did so in the firm belief that it was time that public and professional attention was redirected to primary and early secondary education so that the importance of the early years as a foundation for all learning might be emphasised.

The Council realised that its own expertise in the very early years of schooling and of the developmental stage preceding formal schooling was limited. To overcome these limitations and to ensure that a variety of views would be presented, the Australian Early Childhood Association was commissioned to prepare a paper dealing with the issues for children, teachers and parents in the early years.

This paper, entitled *A Stitch in Time: Strengthening the First Years of School*, is published as a commissioned paper. While the Schools Council had some input into the paper and reacted to the various drafts, the paper does not necessarily represent the views of the Council or of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. It does, however, represent a very worthwhile contribution to the Compulsory Years Project and its objective of stimulating wide discussion.

The Schools Council is grateful for the contribution of the Australian Early Childhood Association and of Ms Jean Gifford, the author of the paper.

Ann Morrow
Chair, Schools Council
May 1992

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Preface

The Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) has for some time felt the need for a re-examination of the issues surrounding the effective teaching of young children in schools. When the Schools Council announced Stage One of its Compulsory Years Project: The Early Years of Schooling, AECA raised with the Schools Council the possibility of a collaborative project. Because of AECA's special expertise in the early childhood field, it was commissioned by the Schools Council to prepare a discussion paper which would canvass a range of issues related to the first years of school from an early childhood perspective. This paper was written for the AECA by Ms Jean Gifford.

The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of either the Schools Council or the Australian Early Childhood Association.

Explanation of Terms for Early Childhood Education in Australia

Early childhood programs are known by many different names across Australia. More confusing still, many terms in common use refer to different programs in different States/Territories.

For simplicity's sake, and in the hope of encouraging a national approach to the use of terminology in the early childhood field, this paper uses the term 'preschool' to refer to programs (usually sessional) offered to children in the twelve months before they commence school. The non-compulsory first year of school is referred to as 'kindergarten' or '(K)'. The two remaining early childhood years of school are called 'Year 1' and 'Year 2'.

The terms 'children's services' and 'early childhood programs' are used in this paper as synonymous, generic terms which encompass the full range of programs found in services for children aged zero–eight in Australia.

The complexities of coming to grips with the early childhood field in Australia are not limited to terminology. The spread of early childhood programs, their reach and degree of interrelatedness vary greatly from one State to another. Often, early childhood programs have grown up haphazardly and in belated recognition of need, rather than by conscious design. They reflect the different histories of the States. Writing a paper from a national perspective inevitably means that some local detail will be wrong, but readers should be able to translate the general message about national trends to the particulars of their own place.

A thumbnail sketch of the structure of each State and Territory's early childhood services is provided at Appendix 1 to give readers a sense of this diversity. There is also a list of terms for early childhood education as they are used in each State and Territory.

Introduction

The 1990s promise to be a decade of great significance for Australian schools. Micro-economic reform has placed education in centre stage as it is now recognised that to become internationally competitive, the entire workforce requires a level of general education and training never before attempted in this country.

Most of the national attention has been focussed on secondary and post-secondary education and vocational training. Particular emphasis is being placed on the acquisition of basic, entry level work skills (Australian Education Council Review Committee 1991 [the Finn Review]).

Centrally important among the work skills to be strengthened are basic literacy, numeracy, problem solving ability, self confidence, self respect and commitment to the workplace. These are skills and attitudes which need to be established long before the worker arrives at the factory or even the high school. They are basic to all successful formal learning and their foundations are laid very early in children's lives as a consequence of their interactions with the world around them, first within their families (Topping 1986) and later in social groups outside the home.

These foundations are strengthened through participation in high quality early childhood programs and consolidated in the first years of primary schooling. It would be short sighted to neglect these crucial early years in an attempt to rectify deficiencies at the top end of the education system. The wisdom in the simple old maxim, 'a stitch in time saves nine', should not be dismissed.

The Schools Council has recognised the importance of directing national attention to the crucial beginning years of education in its current project, The Compulsory Years of Schooling.

The present paper is a commissioned response to the project's first discussion paper, *The Early Years of Schooling* (Schools Council 1991). It is an elaboration of the issues raised in the Schools Council paper as they impact on the youngest children in schools. This paper also examines the way these issues interact with the rest of the early childhood field. Early childhood, by agreed international definition, and as it is understood within Australia, comprises the period from birth to eight. In most Australian school systems, this definition encompasses the first three years of primary schooling.

The early childhood field has adopted the zero–eight definition of early childhood in order to encourage high quality, coherent provision for children in these important formative years. When social systems 'carve up' childhood and provide different services by separated institutions, discontinuities inevitably develop.

Responses to a preliminary draft of this paper from practitioners within the early childhood field reflected frustration with an uncritical acceptance of the status quo in which the gulf between schooling and the rest of early childhood services is frequently very wide. While still acknowledging the present realities of school provision and the restricted domain of the Schools Council, this paper now attempts to give the issue of integrated early childhood services more attention.

The paper touches on a wide range of issues, all of which are dealt with in more depth in other places, but which seem not to have been brought together in this way before. It is hoped that the paper will serve as a stimulus for much further discussion and debate.

The Context

The National Context

Schools are experiencing the impact of the enormous social change that has occurred within Australian society in the last half of this century (Ochiltree 1990). Family structures and work patterns are changing. In particular, the dramatic increase in the workforce participation of married women over the last ten to twenty years poses challenges to the traditional organisation of a large number of institutions, not the least of them being schools wishing to encourage closer participation of parents in their children's schooling.

Changes to the ethnic make-up of Australian society have major implications for the delivery of a whole range of services if they are to be appropriate and accessible to all Australian citizens and residents. The necessary adaptation of Australian institutions has barely begun, and schools have a central role to play.

In the classroom, socially directed programs crowd the curriculum, and the new policy of integrating children with disabilities further complicates the teacher's task, especially in the absence of necessary resources (Westwood 1991).

The very new expectations of the education system are occurring in a climate in which it is believed that increases in productivity can be achieved without additional resources, provided systems are made efficient and accountable (Walker 1990). Accompanying this is a push for standardised, or standards-based, documented outcomes. Curriculum decisions are centralising, while administration and management, especially day to day financial management, are devolving onto schools. Central administration and support structures are being systematically dismantled.

There are also structural changes within Australia that mirror those occurring in schools. These changes are evident throughout industry and government, and reflect global trends towards economic rationalism, managerialism, and instrumentalism.

The new dominance of 'managers' as opposed to 'administrators' is resulting in an erosion of the purchase those with professional knowledge have over the conditions affecting their work. Alongside the shift to managing rather than supporting professionals is a concurrent shift in responsibility for policy making from professionals to the industrial arena; the Industrial Relations Commission, parties to industrial awards and often narrowly based tripartite working parties and consultative committees. The latter set of changes disadvantages all educational groups, including parents and interested members of the community, whose interests are not fully addressed by teacher unions.

The Meaning of the Present Context for Early Childhood Programs in Schools

A major difficulty for early childhood programs in the present climate of change is their almost total lack of a power base within schools, education authorities, teacher training institutions, or within State or Commonwealth Governments. Early childhood programs in schools are invisible in the large number of official reports of schools over recent

years, including *Australia's Teachers* (Schools Council 1990). Reports that recommend remedies fail to consider the impact of change on the early childhood sector, or assume that early childhood programs will fit satisfactorily into models developed for primary schools generally.

This lack of visibility and absence of a voice in modifying proposals for change, coupled with the inability of those with knowledge of early childhood to control major aspects of the large number of changes impinging on schools, teaching and teacher preparation, has many serious implications for the continued existence of effective teaching in the early childhood years in primary schools.

The current vulnerability of the early childhood sector has not always been characteristic of the field. It is worth briefly examining the factors that have led early childhood teachers to their present dilemma.

Historical Perspective

Early childhood teachers trained to work with the age group, zero–eight, emerged with the creation of colleges of advanced education in the 1970s. Prior to that there were essentially two distinct groups of specialist teachers of young children: kindergarten teachers who taught children aged two to five in nursery schools and kindergartens; and infants teachers who worked in schools teaching five to eight year olds.

Both kindergarten and infants teachers had substantial control over their work environment. Most primary schools were divided into infants and upper primary departments, following the British model. Larger schools had entirely separate infants schools.

Promotions positions in infants departments (and infants schools) were the domain of women who had undergone specialised infants training (often an additional year beyond the basic two). While school systems seem to have varied in the extent to which the inspectors of infants teachers had specialised expertise in the teaching of young children, it appears that they often did. A close link between the employing Education Department and teacher training was guaranteed by the fact that the teachers' training colleges were run by the Education Department.

Kindergartens were independent of the school system, and for most of the period before the 1970s existed without government funding or intervention. Kindergarten teachers training colleges were established and run by the employing Kindergarten Unions.

The principals of the Kindergarten Teachers' Colleges met together under the auspices of the Australian Association for Pre-school Child Development (AAPCD), later re-named the Australian Preschool Association (APA) and now called the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA). Both program standards and training standards were established and maintained by this interconnected preschool field through AECA.

In the 1970s and early 1980s most graduates of early childhood education courses worked either in the preschool sector with children three to five years of age, or in schools with children aged five–eight along with teachers who had been trained as infants teachers under the older system. Since then, however, the burgeoning field of children's services has greatly diversified the range of settings in which early childhood teachers may find employment.

An important change, which seems to have occurred in most State systems during the 1970s, was a collapsing of the separate infants promotions lists within primary schools into a single list. Prior to this, infants teachers were prevented from ever becoming principals of primary schools. In some States, such as Victoria, the lists were also separated by gender. A specific promotions position for teachers (nearly always women) in infants sections of schools disappeared, and the concept of an integrated primary school emerged.

The need for reform seems to have been viewed from the perspective of equal employment opportunity for women (Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia 1971). While the change did open up opportunities for women to become primary principals with attendant extra status and pay, the loss of separate identity for infants sections of schools resulted in significant diminution of the power base once held within the first years of Australian schools. With this loss went the view that special early childhood expertise is required to teach children younger than eight.

The creation of colleges of advanced education (CAEs) and the attendant loss of employer-controlled teacher training institutions began the trend towards greater separation of teacher preparation and employment which is now the subject of so much comment (see, for example, Turney & Wright 1991).

The new early childhood teacher education programs varied in the extent to which they were administratively separate from or integrated into generalist departments or schools of teacher education. Briggs (1984) documents the loss of autonomy beginning to be felt in the early childhood field in the early 1980s as a consequence of this first change. Various pressures, including reductions in overall funding and attempts to ensure that trainee teachers were more broadly educated within CAEs, led to a general dilution of the specific early childhood component in many courses.

A second, more recent, major change has been the amalgamation of colleges of advanced education into the Unified National System of Universities which has exacerbated the problems of control already evident in 1984.

There are three interrelated additional factors that have to be considered in order to understand the dilemma of early childhood teachers today. All have to do with status; the status assigned to women, to children, and to those teachers associated with young children. In the academic world, most status accrues to those who work with the oldest students. The academic pecking order has much to do with the place of the child in an adult oriented society; it also reflects a notion that 'teaching' is to do with imparting knowledge, and that the more complex that knowledge is, the more skilled and deserving of respect the teacher.

The importance of this bias cannot be over-emphasized in understanding how it is that the accumulated experience and wisdom of over 100 years of working effectively with young children can be so readily overlooked and forgotten by education departments trying to move schools into the twenty-first century.

As has already been noted, women in the 1970s put aside 'childish things' and sought to join the male dominated world of upper primary in a bid for equality. No education system in Australia any longer requires teachers of the youngest children in schools to

have specialist training to work with this age group. Most systems have lost the last of their early childhood advisory positions, and many no longer have specific provision for early childhood expertise in curriculum development areas.

Working Effectively with Children Aged Five–Eight in Schools

Individual differences between children at any given age are so great that any class, however similar it may seem, must be treated as a collection of children needing individual and different attention (Department of Education and Science 1967 [The Plowden Report]).

It follows that no hard and fast descriptions of the characteristics of children aged five–eight will apply in every case, or that there are sharp distinctions between children in the five–eight range and those who are younger or older. Nevertheless, there are some generalisations that will help those who are not used to working directly with this age group gain some understanding of the different approach to schooling advocated for them by the early childhood profession.

Characteristics of Children Aged Five–Eight

Children aged five–eight are still maturing physically. More adept than four year olds, the five year old still has much to master in the areas of fine motor development and in the perceptuo-motor areas required for swift reading and neat writing. Mylenization of nerve endings is incomplete, as is functional differentiation between the hemispheres of the brain. Kinaesthetic perception is still developing.

They have long attention spans when engrossed, but little voluntary control over the filtering of environmental stimulation, which they need to 'pay attention' at will for long periods, or to split attention safely, as when talking and crossing a road.

Conceptually, many children of this age are not able to understand, in an adult sense, such basic concepts as time, conservation of number, or the necessity of logic. Children of this age can understand connections, but cannot 'abstract' relationships beyond their immediate experience. It is particularly this 'concreteness' of children's thought that dictates an approach to teaching in early childhood that is active, that uses concrete objects, and that capitalises on multi-sensory experiences.

Basic motor skills are achieved by age six or seven, but refining them, integrating them and developing complex movement sequences develops slowly through later childhood. Children of this age enjoy and need frequent opportunities to let off steam through large-muscle activity such as running, skipping, climbing and rough and tumble play fighting. Children entering school at five may still have trouble tying shoe laces, doing up difficult buttons, or opening their lunch boxes.

Linguistically, these children are refining their knowledge of grammar, and may still be making mistakes by over-generalising rules. They will not master complex language constructions such as subordinate clauses for several more years, and still have difficulty understanding the passive voice.

Socially, children in this age group are beginning to experiment with rule-governed group behaviour. Friendships are important, but often are more short-lived than will be the case later. The level of sophistication of children's social skills will depend greatly

on their opportunity to interact with groups of children prior to entering school. Many children have difficulty in gaining social acceptance from the children they would like to play with, and need the intervention of understanding teachers.

Emotionally, children aged five–eight are still very young, and need a great deal of nurturing in between educational challenges. They need attention and approval from the teacher as well as freedom to set some of their own goals. They are eager to learn, show strong curiosity and are able to derive intrinsic satisfaction from gaining new skills and practising old ones. Many opportunities to fall back into comfortable and familiar routines and play activities are required to balance the challenge of difficult or new tasks. Play is still an important and useful vehicle for learning for this age group.

The diversity of children's experience prior to school adds considerably to the normal variation in children's competence in this age range. A few children still arrive at primary school straight from home but most will already have had some form of experience in settings outside the family. Many States/Territories have policies of universal preschool provision for the twelve months prior to school entry. These programs are not compulsory, but are extensively utilised. Most children will also have had some experience of childcare, if only part-time. An increasing number of children come to school with years of out-of-home group care under their belt. This at times startling variation in children's range of experience before starting school is very recent, much of it having occurred within the last decade.

Children's competence is also culturally shaped to a significant degree, in ways that probably are not yet fully appreciated. Malin (1990) paints a disturbing picture of how some of these competencies can be misread or simply not noticed when teachers are unaware of their own culturally determined expectations of children. It is almost certain that every culture imposes some different constraints on children's development, which will lead to misunderstandings in the classroom unless the teacher is especially sensitive to this possibility.

Children with disabilities have all of the above characteristics. In addition, however, they have special needs which will be as variable as the number of individuals involved. A common thread will be their need to become as fully integrated into the classroom as possible.

The Nature of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Schools

Good practice in schools depends on seeing the world through each child's eyes, registering objectively their interests and existing competencies, and understanding sufficiently the principles of development to know how to help each child learn efficiently, effectively and meaningfully. Good practice does not permit asking children to learn now, with difficulty, something they will manage more easily later. Nor does it include busy work, the teaching of isolated skill development through memorisation and rote, or a reliance on work sheets.

Early childhood practitioners have long recognised that effective teaching in this age group must be child-centred, informal, and based on a wide variety of active, manipulative activities, which begin with children's existing knowledge and interests and build on these. Children commonly work individually or in small groups, coming together as a whole group for a portion of the day only.

Most early childhood educators call for an integrated curriculum. Some advocate the use of themes as a device for achieving this integration, especially if the theme has arisen from the children's own interests. All accept the importance of play periods during the day. Purists insist that there are no distinctions that can usefully be made between work and play in the early childhood years, including the first years of school. A few (e.g. Creaser 1990) encourage the use of 'pretend' play as the basis for the curriculum.

But teaching in early childhood does not mean simply relying on children's capacity to play and explore. New insights into the nature of development and learning suggest that effective teaching involves guiding children's learning, emphasising that much learning occurs and is understood in a social context (David 1990; Fleer, in press).

Making Early Childhood Principles Explicit

The premises underlying early childhood methods are so different from those familiar to other educators that they require explanation in terms teachers working in other levels of education can relate to. The largely separate history of the field has meant that until now very little serious dialogue has occurred between early childhood teachers and others. Efforts to communicate are often thwarted by unclear, 'inhouse' language.

Some work has begun on making early childhood practice comprehensible to outsiders. In the face of increasing pressure to introduce formal instruction in academic skills into early childhood programs of all kinds in America, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1986 issued a position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs (Bredekamp 1986). This statement effectively translated early childhood tenets into easily understood do's and don't's and has become a best seller.

More recently, NAEYC have felt compelled to put into writing a set of guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in early childhood programs, addressing not only *how* to teach, but *what* to teach. The resulting guidelines were developed jointly with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 1991).

David (1990), writing from the perspective of a national education system in the United Kingdom which is characterised by tightening national curricula developed from the 'top down' with attendant assessment of attainment levels, urges the early childhood field there to sharpen up their defence of good practice through much clearer articulation of early childhood philosophy and practice.

The Australian early childhood field needs to work harder to translate its tenets into understandable language if it is to retain these principles in the face of mounting pressure to standardise teaching practice across the primary years. This is all the more necessary since the additional pressures towards inappropriate practice evident in the United Kingdom are likely to be felt here eventually, given the present moves towards similar schooling policies.

In 1988 a Statement of Principles for the Education of Children in the Early Years of School in Australia and New Zealand was adopted following widespread consultation in both countries. The statement is a good distillation of the essential principles underlying

the education of children in the early years of school and hence an important reference for those with responsibility for early childhood programs, but provides little help to those wanting to explain or defend the principles to others.

Documenting good practice in explicit terms does more than explain methodology to the uninitiated. It also clarifies debates within the field, and permits teachers to think more critically about their own teaching practices. Teaching inevitably reflects individual theories of development, the learning process and the teacher's own cultural biases (McLean 1991). An ability to reflect constantly on one's practice and to make the theory underlying practice explicit is at least as important in teaching young children as it is anywhere else in education.

Goodnow offers a number of useful suggestions on ways to make the goals of early childhood education very explicit and concrete. For example, she suggests that within the broader goal of helping children to be effective individuals, there could be the goal of being effective in group situations. 'Children need to acquire ways of telling other people what they need', is suggested as an alternative to the more typical goal of developing language skills' (Goodnow 1989, p.8). Having this explicit goal might have alerted the teacher, described so painfully by Malin, to the efforts of the Aboriginal child in her class to do just this, but in ways which she could not 'read'.

Battersby (1988) and Sparrow (1991) insist that these steps alone will not uncover the true power relationships operating within the classroom and in wider society. Without an analysis of whose interests are being served in the classroom, early childhood teachers risk perpetuating an unjust status quo. Battersby advocates introducing trainee teachers to 'critical pedagogy', in which students are challenged to view standard education as society's main arm of social control. The aim of such an approach is to jolt students out of complacent acceptance of 'the way things are', at the same time as empowering them to see themselves as agents of social change in the interests of achieving genuine social justice.

Teaching across Social Class and Cultural Boundaries

Australia is recognised as a world leader in addressing multicultural issues. Much more needs to be learned about effective teaching using a multicultural curriculum, but an impressive start has been made, especially within early childhood. However, teaching children who come from other social backgrounds or cultures probably requires more than adapting the curriculum. The nature of the teaching process itself may need to be adapted. Some groups, such as disadvantaged Aboriginal children, may need a more structured approach to teaching than is normally advocated for early childhood (Boomer 1986; Sparrow 1991). When teaching any child from a socio-ethnic background that differs from their own, early childhood teachers should be aware of their need to teach children functional classroom skills. Among these, Boomer lists 'how to deal with teachers, how to ask and answer questions, how to produce what is valued, and how to seek out demonstrations when they need it' (Boomer 1986, p.31). Unless teachers are careful to do this these children appear somehow to learn to feel 'not at home' at school.

Gender Bias

Girls may also learn unintended lessons from classroom teachers. They receive much less attention from teachers, get less credit for their successes (which tend to be attributed to hard work rather than talent), and experience disapproval when they display ambition or are lively in class. Many appear to learn to be helpless (Vander, Zanden & Pace 1984) while many more learn to hide their abilities.

Gender equity policies are gradually eliminating gender-based discriminatory practices, curriculum and materials in schools (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1988), but the more subtle biases against girls will remain as long as teachers have different expectations of boys and girls, particularly when the underlying assumptions and values are deep seated and largely unrecognised or acknowledged.

Despite the serious commitment within Government and in education departments to implement the national policy for the education of girls in Australian schools, there is strong evidence that children still enter school with established, stereotyped views of their options and capabilities based on gender (Kavanagh 1985). Much more attention needs to be paid to children's early experiences in education and care programs.

Derman-Sparks (1991; Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force 1989) argues for the need for teachers to shape their programs so that children receive a strong sense of identity without feeling superior to others who are different. The anti-bias approach she advocates puts all the 'isms' together in a way which is quite different from the existing programs on gender equity in Australian schools. Derman-Sparks recommends a process of contextual curriculum planning in which teachers' values are considered in the light of their impact on children from other classes, cultures, races, their gender and whether they have disabilities in order to create a curriculum which is genuinely anti-bias. A number of early childhood programs in Australia are attempting to implement an anti-bias curriculum following this model.

Appropriate Staffing Levels/Class Sizes

Nothing dramatic happens between the ages of four and five to change the child's need for a share of the teacher's time. Yet schools, in comparison with preschools, substantially reduce children's access to individual attention from teachers due to staffing and class size practices. Preschool programs for four year olds usually call for two staff (a qualified teacher and an assistant) and one parent helper per group of twenty-five children, giving an adult:child ratio of 1:8. Kindergarten classes typically have one teacher per class of twenty to twenty-five. Ten per cent of primary classes, including junior primary, experience class sizes of over thirty children, and this figure is likely to grow (Australian Teachers Union 1991). Nationally, teacher:child ratios do not drop below this figure until children reach senior secondary school (Australian Teachers Union 1988).

This upside-down reduction in class sizes for oldest children has historic rather than educational bases (Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia 1971). Despite repeated attempts to reorder educational priorities, teachers in early childhood classes still struggle with inappropriate class sizes and ratios.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission recognised that current practices in junior primary classes needed to be changed. Though recommending lower class sizes throughout the school sector, the Schools Commission considered that priority should be given to reducing class sizes in Junior Primary. Recognising the good sense of 'a stitch in time', the Commission argued that the additional expenditure required to make the provision of more individualised learning programs possible for beginning learners would produce lasting educational benefits (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1984).

The poorer teacher:child ratios in primary classes inevitably alter the nature of the teaching that is possible in schools. Cleave et al (1982) documented the shift towards inappropriate practice evident between preschool programs and infant classes in Britain. They particularly noted a large increase in 'dead' or non-task time in infants classes, due mostly to organisational procedures. There was also a significant loss of child choice over how time was spent. Whereas free choice prevailed in pre schools, children in infant classes spent over 80 per cent of their time in either no-choice or limited-choice situations. The likelihood that similar differences would be found in Australia between early childhood programs in preschools and schools is supported by research conducted in Western Australia by Tayler and Pratt (1985).

Campbell (1991) has asserted that overcrowding itself influences children's ability to work constructively and stay on task. When children are forced to work in too large a group they begin to display increasing amounts of withdrawn or aggressive behaviour as a consequence of reduced personal space.

Ideally, each class within the first three years of school (assuming a structure K–2 dealing with years five–eight) should have a full-time teaching assistant as happens in preschools. It is interesting that pre-primary classes for five year olds in Western Australia are staffed in this way. Failing this, teachers should be provided with regular part-time assistants, with the larger balance of time going to classes with the youngest children.

The Schools Commission tackled the problem from the other end, by recommending lower class sizes. They recommended an upper limit of fifteen children for kindergarten (pre-Year 1), twenty for Years 1–2, and twenty-five for Years 3–6 (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1984).

Key Principle

- **The Commonwealth Schools Commission ideal class size standard of fifteen children for kindergarten classes and twenty children for Years 1–2 should be adopted by schools; or**
- **the recommended class size standard could be viewed as an adult:child ratio of 1:15 (as in preschool programs, staff making up this ratio could consist of one trained teacher and one full-time assistant).**
- **In either case, the effective ratio should be reduced to 1:15 in Kindergarten classes and 1:20 in Years 1–2 as quickly as possible. While working to achieve this ratio, classes with ratios lower than this should immediately be provided with the help of part-time teacher aides, with the most time being allocated to the youngest classes.**

Routines and Timetables

Young children need structure. All classrooms should have predictable routines running through each day. Structure does not imply rigidity, however. Children need opportunities to become deeply involved in activities that interest them, to finish complex games and projects, and to have time to think and reflect on what they have done or would like to do. Timetables that involve changes of activity every twenty minutes to half an hour do not permit this.

An integrated curriculum makes this looser organisation of the day more possible, as do approaches such as the Anti-Bias Curriculum (Derman-Sparks et al 1989), which offer ways of infusing many of the new issues to be addressed in schools into a general approach rather than as a topic to be treated in its own right.

Appropriate Class Organisation—The Case for Vertical Grouping

In the late 1960s Plowden recommended that English schools should abandon separate age grouping in infants classes in favour of vertical grouping. She suggested that classes should have a single annual intake of five year olds, and that the children should remain in the class with the same teacher until they attained the age of eight (Department of Education and Science 1967). Plowden noted that vertical grouping had first been experimented with in infant schools from as early as 1933, and was common practice in the two or three districts in England that had the strongest commitment to the principles of the infant school.

The idea of vertical grouping is thus not new. Its advantages are the greater flexibility offered when chronological ages are mixed in this way. No single set of competencies can be assumed, so that individual children are much more likely to have their differences recognised and catered for. Children are able to learn from each other in both directions—the younger children by modelling the behaviour of the older ones, and the older children through having the opportunity to consolidate important foundation skills being offered the youngest children. If the curriculum used is open-ended, allowing children to perform at different levels while working together on the same project, this form of teaching can be both manageable and rewarding.

Teaching mixed abilities is much more economically managed within an integrated curriculum approach than in a more structured, segmented program in which reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects are dealt with separately, with pre-determined objectives already defined for each year level. Educational outcomes are also likely to be better (Barbour 1990).

Most schools in Australia operate some classes with de-facto vertical grouping in the form of 'composite' classes as a result of uneven enrolments. Unlike the philosophically based vertical classes, composite classes tend to be viewed negatively by everyone—teachers, parents, school systems, government and the community at large.

A study conducted in Western Australia by Pratt and Treacy (1986) illustrated why composite classes were so disliked by teachers. The teachers in these classrooms tended to treat each year as a separate class, planned for them separately, taught them

separately, and kept two sets of planning worksheets. Structuring the classes as they did, they felt the need to begin working with children in one level as soon as they had the other level working independently.

Despite the poor image of composite classes, there is support in the community for mixed age groupings when these are deliberately created (Queensland Department of Education 1986; Victorian Ministry of Education and Training 1991). An increasing number of Victorian schools are working with classes structured in this way, though a majority are not. Other States report small numbers of classrooms taking this approach by choice. By far the most preferred organisation, however, is one teacher and twenty-five (or more) horizontally grouped children, with mixed-age composite classes being a common but undesired necessity.

A policy decision to adopt vertical grouping in early childhood classes could not be implemented in isolation from other reforms. A first step would be to encourage the employment of teachers with specialised training in working with children in informal, integrated, developmentally-based ways. Many State education departments currently have a policy of preferring generalist primary teachers in order to have greater flexibility in staffing schools. These same teachers, however, often lack the training needed to work comfortably with mixed-age groups in a developmentally based program.

Key Principle

- **Schools should aim to ensure that early childhood classes are taught by teachers qualified in early childhood education.**

Entry and Transition Issues

Entry Age and Timing of Entry

Notions of when children should start school vary considerably from one country to another. Australian schools, like British ones, have allowed children to begin school at a relatively young age. Other countries have delayed entry until children are six or even seven.

Most Australian States and Territories assume that schools will cater for children from age five. The two largest States allow children to begin school at four and a half. Western Australia is the exception. Children there commence junior primary at six. Victoria is currently examining its age of entry policy. Among the reasons given for this re-assessment is a survey showing that many parents are delaying children's entry into school on the grounds that four and a half is too young (Victorian Ministry of Education and Training 1991).

Apart from minimum age, there is also the issue of when during the year children should be admitted to school. A number of possibilities exist, and have been tried in different systems at different times. The main options are single entry at the beginning of the year, dual entry, often at the beginning and mid-point of the year, and continuous entry on the fifth birthday or at the beginning of the term following the fifth birthday. Continuous entry policies frequently have a mid-year cut-off.

Because children's birthdays occur throughout the year, a continuous entry policy which allows all children to start school at the same chronological age would seem most equitable. However, there are a number of practical problems which tend to discourage its use. A working party in Tasmania found strong support for continuous entry, but both the profession and the community believed that its implementation would require a considerable change in attitude (Tasmanian Education Department 1989).

Some systems have tried continuous entry with mixed success. For it to work, teachers have to be geared to teaching an individualised program and have to have enough time to carry it through. Support for the policy diminished in the Australian Capital Territory when schools ceased to be staffed on projected maximum enrolments from the beginning of the year. The continuous entry policy used in New Zealand appears to work because of a generous staffing policy.

School Readiness

Murray (1987) concluded that the disadvantages of any enrolment policy stem from the disparity in relative ages of children who end up together in classes, and the way these differences are managed by the teacher, rather than chronological age per se. These conclusions are supported by Lambert who reviewed research concerned with age of entry, measures of 'school readiness', and school performance. She also concluded that 'The real problem of school age entrance may not be when but how' (Lambert 1987, p.11).

The concept of school readiness has re-asserted itself recently in the United States as a consequence of a national policy to ensure that by the year 2000, all children will start school 'ready to learn'. The policy discriminates against children who are developmentally slower than most, who are kept out of school until they are 'ready'. An NAEYC Position Statement on school readiness developed in response to the policy asserts that it is the responsibility of schools to meet the educational needs of children who attend, not the responsibility of children to prove they are ready for school. The only non-discriminatory educational enrolment policy is one based on chronological age (NAEYC 1990). Though there is no suggestion yet of such an idea crossing the Pacific, the position adopted by NAEYC in relation to school entry appears relevant and useful.

Key Principle

- **Entry policies should be based on age, and should be matched with structure and style of classroom teaching to minimise the difficulties caused by the particular policy adopted.**

Single entry permits everyone to be oriented at the same time, but age differences will be at their widest. Continuous entry permits every child to start school at the same age but requires constant initiation of newcomers, and accommodation of the group to them. Other options provide less extreme mixes of these advantages and disadvantages. There does not appear to be any obvious 'best' way. Once again, though, a more open structure within the five–eight age group minimises the problems caused by unequal amounts of time spent by children in the first year of school due to birthdate. Systems should also bear in mind that decisions they make with regard to enrolment procedures have large impacts on early childhood programs feeding into primary schools.

Key Principle

- **For the sake of those families who move interstate while children are in school, there seem to be good arguments for introducing uniformity between States in the ages children start school, and the structure of the education system generally. A standard thirteen years of education beginning with kindergarten for five year olds, being the most common pattern, should be adopted by all States and Territories.**

Transition

Coming to 'big school' represents a challenge to most children, even those with prior experience in early childhood programs. David (1990) reviews recent research on factors which affect the ease with which children settle into school. A significant aspect of this 'settling in' is learning to place the experiences of school into the context of the child's earlier learning.

Children entering school encounter a number of discontinuities with previous experience. They have much less access to adult attention, the regime may be quite different, there is less choice, less space, and there may be new expectations from the teacher, who may use a new teaching style.

Cleave et al (1982) also documented many of these differences between preschools and infant schools in Britain, some of which were noted in the discussion of class size and teacher:child ratios. Some of the differences seemed to arise from more than the

pressures of dealing with larger groups. Most striking perhaps was the dramatic swing in the balance of the curriculum towards verbal and symbolic activities and away from the arts and gross motor activities, reflecting a different sense of educational purpose.

There is a need for more Australian research before it would be possible to describe with confidence what occurs throughout the country. Research in Western Australia has documented similar differences between pre-primary and junior primary classes to those found in Britain (Tayler & Pratt 1985; Halliwell 1991).

Mellor (1991) argues that these differences arise from different views of purpose, philosophy and teaching method, and that these stem from the very different histories of the preschool and the infant/primary school sectors and the different emphases provided in their separate teacher training programs as outlined earlier. Preschool teachers have been taught to enhance children's development. Primary teachers, in contrast, have been trained to teach children curriculum subjects. Infant specialisation helped teachers use developmentally appropriate activities to enhance children's understanding and mastery of curriculum subjects, but the emphasis remained on separate curriculum areas.

The development of an early childhood specialisation spanning the age range zero–eight has done much to eliminate the old divisions in philosophies between preschool and the first years of school. However, as Mellor also acknowledges, infant/primary classes have always struggled with the constraints of imposed curriculum, large group size, and limited spaces filled with standard classroom furniture. Even when early childhood trained junior primary teachers wish to offer programs similar in nature to those given in preschools, external constraints and isolation make this very difficult.

Cleave et al (1982) also highlighted the importance of such physical factors as the location of the rooms to be used by the child, such as different classrooms, the library, lunch area, school hall, and most especially the toilet. Children will find their way around in 'big school' most easily if these areas are near each other.

Key Principle

- **Schools should consider the needs of children in early childhood classes when allocating available space within the school. Wherever possible children in K–2 should be provided with easy access to the playground, toilets and sufficient classroom space to permit the creation of permanent space for play as well as table and storage space.**

Most schools employ at least some of a range of useful techniques to ease the shock for children when they first start school. Among these are gentle admissions procedures (staggering the first day of enrolment, encouraging parents to stay for a while, letting the children come after the rest of the school has started), pre-entry school visits by children, and explanatory booklets, talks and videos for parents. Teachers in primary school also need to visit the early childhood programs in their surrounding district, and to participate in exchange visits of teachers between the early childhood program and the school. According to David (1990) schools should consider adapting to meet the child, rather than expecting other early childhood programs to 'prepare' the child for school as often seems to be the case (Davies & North 1990).

Ease of entry into school is made more complex when both parents (or a single parent) work. Some children do not have the stamina to manage a full day, five days a week when they first start school. Many schools let kindergarten children leave early for the first few weeks and encourage a few individual children to have a day at home occasionally when school is too tiring for them. Parents sometimes keep children home in this way, even if the school has not suggested it. Both the shorter day and the respite day are more difficult options for working parents. Some schools sensibly allow those few children who still need afternoon sleeps to go to sick bay. Schools really need to examine their approach if many children are getting too tired.

The increase in working mothers means that in addition to preschools, local childcare services also need to be considered when developing transition mechanisms. Work-based and work related childcare in which services are located at or near the place of work present particularly difficult problems, as children will attend many different primary schools none of which may necessarily be in the neighbourhood of the childcare centre. Schools near work-based childcare centres can help by developing links with them. Even though children may not attend the school, their experiences visiting 'big school' will help them prepare for their own school. Such links provide benefits for children and staff in both the school and the childcare centre.

Key Principle

- **Schools should develop and maintain close links with neighbouring early childhood services, and deliberately involve these services in transition to school programs.**

Early Childhood Schools

There would appear to be some good arguments for organising schools differently to eliminate the large break between school and other early childhood programs. There are already some early childhood schools in Australia that cater for children three–eight years of age. In the current climate of concern for educational standards and the push for the early acquisition of skills, most early childhood professionals would have strong reservations about any large scale plan to reorganise schools to cater for such young children until the average classroom for Years K–2 was managing to implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum with more ease.

In the longer term, however, these kinds of developments could make sense. In the meantime, much stronger links need to be forged between all the services involved with young children, including much closer working relationships between all the government authorities responsible for these services. In many parts of the country, informal networks of early childhood teachers have begun to develop. By giving often very isolated early childhood teachers in schools, preschools or child care centres opportunity to mix together and share common concerns and interests, much can be achieved to break down old barriers and diminish the likelihood of serious discontinuity between programs for children.

Integrating Preschool and Primary School

Some States/Territories have sought to minimize transition problems by integrating preschool programs into a continuous Years P–2 program. Some consider that in Tasmania at least, this approach has helped to 'filter upwards' the early childhood ethos of focusing on the child. Others, in other States, feel that closer contact between preschool and primary school has resulted in a trend during the 1980s towards more formal, academic approaches being adopted in the preschools.

In some States there is evidence of an attempt to modify approaches within schools to make teaching practice more consonant with early childhood philosophy. However, meaningful change requires more than the development of policies and curricula. In a report of the Years P–10 curriculum review in Queensland, the Queensland Department of Education acknowledges that there are considerable gaps between theory and practice, due in part to the lack of preparation among primary and high school teachers to work within a more developmentally based curriculum framework, the physical plan of schools and their organisational structure and the age-related system of pupil progression (Queensland Department of Education 1991).

Halliwell (1990) also expresses concern for the impact of the introduction of Years P–10 or K–12 curriculum frameworks on early childhood teaching. Eliminating discontinuities inevitably means becoming more alike. There is concern that the curriculum frameworks being adopted by systems push the early childhood curriculum towards inappropriate primary and secondary methods and objectives.

Schools and Parents

Parent Expectations of Early Childhood Programs

How do parents view early childhood programs? Do they have different expectations of child care, preschool and school? If existing boundary lines between these programs were redrawn, would parents object? Recent attempts to realign early childhood programs in several States and in the Australian Capital Territory suggest they would, though the basis for parent reaction is not always clear. Research underway in Queensland ((Ministerial Consultative Council on Curriculum Steering Committee 7 1991) may provide a better basis for understanding parent expectations of early childhood programs in that State, and could usefully be replicated nationally.

The collective view of parents is more easily identified as it can be found in the policies of parent organisations. They strongly support the need for greater coherence between early childhood programs, including the first years of school, and for teaching across the whole sector to be based on early childhood methods (Federation of School and Community Organisations [FOSCO] 1991; Victorian Federation of State School Parent Councils [VFSSPC] 1991).

Parents universally want what is best for their children. Their ideas of how this is to be achieved may be shaped by their own experience in school, as well as by the nature of their relationship with their child's teacher and the quality of the feedback they receive on the school's goals and their child's progress in the classroom.

Parents will support teachers and their methods when they are convinced that the teachers know what they are doing, that the teachers have detailed knowledge of what the child is doing and share that knowledge with parents, and have concrete educational plans for the child's progression. Parents also want normative information on how their child's progress sits alongside age related expectations and want to feel comfortable that the teachers' assessments match their own observations of their child's competencies at home.

Strenthening the Partnership with Parents

An effective working relationship with parents will make other aspects of teaching easier and ultimately more effective. It is much easier to discuss problems after an effective working relationship has been established than before. Many parents already know this, and make a point of developing this relationship. Teachers need to take the initiative with parents who are less confident in schools, and who may be very intimidated by teachers. These are the parents whose involvement in school will ultimately matter most for their children's educational attainment.

Working effectively with parents means much more than getting to know the individual parents of children in a class, however. Teachers and parents need to be partners if schooling is to be truly effective. This partnership needs to be evident at the level of the individual parent and teacher as well as collectively within schools between teacher and parent groups, and within school systems between administrative bodies and representative parent bodies.

In one sense, teachers and parents are always partners in the task of socialising and educating children. The partnership exists regardless of whether it is recognised as legitimate or real. Teachers acquire those parenting responsibilities associated with care and duty towards the child during the school day. Conversely, parents begin the task of teaching long before their children reach school age, and continue contributing to children's learning outside school hours throughout each child's school career.

Much evidence suggests that parents are, in fact, the child's most important teachers and have a more powerful influence on children's school performance than teachers have (Committee of Review of NSW Schools [the Carrick Report] 1990; Eastman 1989; Topping 1986). Both the Coleman Report in the United States and the Plowden Report in the United Kingdom asserted that family background and attitude to schooling had more to do with a child's school success than inputs from school.

An effective partnership between parents and teachers in relation to teachers' work with children in schools recognises the important, but different, educational roles both parents and teachers play in relation to the child's overall learning. It also recognises the primacy of parent responsibility for their individual children, the primacy of teachers' responsibility for professional input and methods of pedagogy, and shared responsibility for establishing educational goals and developing the full range of policies that set out the parameters within which teachers work and schools operate.

The partnership model implies an openness about what is occurring in schools and requires that schools ensure that parents know what is happening, and why. Most importantly, a partnership means that parents are involved with schools, not at their invitation, but by right and in ways which they have negotiated. It needs to be acknowledged that many teachers and principals are uncomfortable with this definition of partnership, as it seems to diminish their power and control over classrooms. Parents, too, sometimes prefer to leave schooling 'to the experts', particularly when they have been alienated from schooling by their school experience. Individual parents will want to become involved in schools in many different ways, and a wide variety of strategies to define the partnership should be developed to make this possible (Australian Council of State School Organisations [ACSSO] 1991).

There is overwhelming evidence, however, that parent involvement in schools leads to better child outcomes (Greenberg 1989; Henderson 1988). The first years of school are critical ones for establishing strong and cooperative relationships between parents and schools. Once begun, parents, with help from schools, can build on this early relationship to become true partners in the education process. Early childhood teachers need to have much more training in working in partnership with parents than now occurs in teacher training courses to support their ability to involve parents in their children's education.

Mechanisms for Collaboration

Teachers in the early years of school have more opportunities for informal meetings with parents than do teachers of children whose parents no longer attend the school daily to drop them off and pick them up. Classrooms in which parents *come inside* in the mornings and afternoons will provide the most opportunity to exchange information about events of importance to the child at home and in school. Many early childhood

classes also involve parents in the classroom, often to listen to reading, help in the library or other such specific tasks but sometimes also to help in more general ways as a means of reducing the child/adult ratio in the classroom.

Children place enormous value on seeing their parents and teachers together (Connell et al 1982). Schools in which parents participate during the day need to find ways to bring working parents into the school as well. It is important for these families also to have opportunities for meaningful involvement with the school program, and for children to be aware of their parents' role in the school. Some schools hold weekend or late afternoon events as a means of opening up access to all families. Breakfast or lunch time events may also be successful.

Schools that have before and after school care programs operating within the school also help to make the connections between home and school for the child. Often staff and parents form very close relationships. Schools with good links to these programs can capitalize on this relationship to involve parents they may otherwise seldom see.

Most important, however, is a climate of acceptance within the school that today's parents do work, and are entitled to do so. Just as notes home should not imply that either mothers or fathers are automatically the only parent interested in the message, schools need to be sensitive to communications of any kind which signal an assumption that one parent is at home and available to work in canteens, help on excursions, attend a mid-morning school concert, or sew up a costume for a school play at short notice. Many parents, given enough notice, will willingly make arrangements to get enough time off to come to the concert, but will appreciate schools meeting them half-way.

In addition to informal mechanisms for bringing the school and family closer together, schools need formal procedures for ensuring regular exchange of information. Many schools hold information nights at the beginning of each year to introduce teachers to parents. Regular newsletters keep parents informed of school events and policies (and are still apt to get home and be read by parents of this age group). It is important, though, that communication is two-way. Formal mechanisms for receiving information from home need to be instituted as well.

Parent–teacher interviews are the most commonly used mechanisms for this. Opportunities for unhurried, private communication are essential when either teacher or parent have concerns, and may not be provided by standard parent–teacher interview sessions. As important as opportunity is an attitude which acknowledges that parents are experts from whom teachers have much to learn, especially about their particular child, but also about cultural norms and expectations and parents' perspectives generally.

Reporting to Parents

Reporting children's progress needs to be undertaken within a partnership framework. For this to happen, the reporting process must be responsive and must be based on clear and comprehensive information about the school's curriculum and assessment (Victorian State Board of Education undated).

Parents and Policy

Parents have an important role to play in shaping policy for their children's schools. Brown, Cahir and Reeve (1987) argue that goals for equality of outcome in schools will not be achieved without enlisting the full partnership of parents in the development of educational policy. Many view the evelopment of school councils in many States and Territories as an important new opportunity for parents to participate in the development of school policy.

One of the concerns being expressed about devolution is that schools are increasingly occupied with day-to-day management, while policy areas such as curriculum development are centralising. Parent involvement in schools could easily be reduced to helping principals decide between paying for minor maintenance or the purchase of needed school supplies. At the systems level, there is concern that the new managerialist style of decision-making is reducing effective input from parent organisations. In a recent submission to the New South Wales report, *Teacher Education: Directions and Strategies*, the Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO) wrote, 'One of the major fears about the Schools Renewal process expressed by parents and teachers alike is that they are being "used" as cheap labour but excluded from the policy making areas especially curriculum' (FOSCO undated, p.3).

The School and the Wider Community

Schools and Community

Social planners in Canberra consciously used the school as a focus for the development of a sense of community within neighbourhoods. Undoubtedly, local schools have always served this function to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the availability of other commonly used institutions within a town or suburb.

Planners in Canberra considered the school to be important within the neighbourhood for a number of social reasons, seeing the school often as the one uniting and common social space in an otherwise isolating, private environment. Local schools that become important in the social fabric of parents' lives will also work better for young children. Small, neighbourhood schools within safe walking distance of home and local shops help young children integrate their life at home and at school and in the local neighbourhood.

Most school systems are experiencing financial restraint, and many are examining the need to rationalise existing school facilities as school populations in older areas decline. There appear to be strong reasons for retaining the principle of the neighbourhood school wherever possible, however, especially for schools catering for children aged five–eight. There is a view among some American educationists that one of their biggest mistakes was the school consolidation program during the 1960s and 1970s which saw the creation of massive regional primary schools which children reached by buses coming from all over the district.

Strengthening Schools through Links with the Community

Local communities have many resources that can be used by schools when strong links are forged between the school and the local community. Most communities have resources that schools can tap, if the effort is made to discover them. Adults in the community may have knowledge they would be willing to share with the school if invited, as was so dramatically illustrated in the 'Foxfire' project, in which Southern Appalachian school children in the United States interviewed their elderly neighbours and documented a wealth of traditional crafts and living skills that had been all but lost as the mountains opened up to the influence of modern Western culture. Local shops and business clubs are often strong supporters of school–community projects, with benefits flowing both ways. Community use of school space after school hours is also an important deterrent to vandalism. School systems, which currently charge even non-profit community groups heavily for the use of school space, could usefully re-examine how much good sense there is in this policy.

Accountability of School Programs and School-based Evaluation

It is reasonable for schools to respond to calls for greater accountability to the community. The difficulty is to know how to respond without, paradoxically, damaging the effectiveness of programs in the process. Australia has the advantage of lagging behind moves in this direction in the United States and United Kingdom education systems, and perhaps may learn from those countries' mistakes.

Standardised Testing

Measuring school effectiveness is no easy task. If the wrong measures are used, school programs may become distorted in an attempt to improve ratings, to the detriment of real educational outcomes for children (Kamii 1990; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 1991).

In the United States in particular, where schools are under the control of locally elected school boards, mandated systems-wide standardised paper and pencil achievement tests have had widespread usage as a means of delivering on promises to make schools accountable. In many American schools, tests are routinely used to screen children before school admittance, and as a basis for promotion to the next grade. As a consequence of the types of tests chosen, school curricula are being affected adversely, according to those who advocate early childhood methods. Many kindergarten classes are becoming highly structured 'watered down' versions of first grade, while preschools also feel pressured to 'get children ready' for school (NAEYC 1988).

Some school systems in Australia have already moved to introduce systems-wide paper and pencil testing for basic skills, though at least in NSW, the first State to commence testing, a study of the effects of the tests on classroom teaching was to be undertaken as part of the evaluation of the testing program (NSW Education Department 1989). Another concern with systems-wide standardised tests, apart from their potential to distort teaching practice, is the lack of useful information they provide to systems, teachers, or parents. If a school's scores are low, what does this mean? What practical steps do teachers need to take in relation to individual children's learning to improve their performance? The tests say what children cannot do, but do not give clues as to why. Tests designed to highlight competencies rather than deficits provide more meaningful data for teachers.

A more promising approach to providing this kind of diagnostic analysis of student competence is the student profiles beginning to be used in Victoria. These profiles are a series of concise descriptive statements, called indicators, arranged in levels of achievement known as bands. They are intended to be based on evidence built up over time, and may be derived from a variety of types of observations rather than a single test. The advantage of profiles for teachers is that they require careful, detailed *observation* of the child. Even if used in no other way, the act of completing the profiles will provide teachers with valuable information about the children in their classroom. Teachers would have much more explicit and meaningful information to exchange with parents than is often the case now.

Monitoring the system as a whole through the use of profiles is planned from 1992, beginning with the Year 6 population and using the Literacy Profile. In 1993, literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 6, and 9 are to be examined (Pullen 1991). It is not yet clear whether adding normative standards to what were designed to be individual profiles will prove equally useful.

Accreditation of Programs

Another approach to quality assurance is to focus on the teacher and other elements of the school environment, rather than on the child. This is the approach adopted by hospitals. The complexities of measuring effectiveness of health care services in terms of patient outcomes are obvious, and not really so very different from trying to judge schools on the basis of student performance. Hospitals, through an industry-based professional council, voluntarily subject themselves to a thorough inspection by their peers to see if they meet the standards required to be accredited. The standards they must meet are those which, by consensus, are agreed to represent a high standard of health care in hospitals.

A similar system has been developed for early childhood programs in the United States by NAEYC, and is now planned for early childhood programs in Australia beginning with long day care centres. Although the accreditation system as a whole is to be voluntary, the Commonwealth is planning to require a subset of standards within the accreditation package to be complied with if services wish to be eligible to receive fee relief subsidies. These mandated standards are likely to relate to features of programs that no child should have to go without. An important feature of the accreditation process is that it is an open one, involving management committees, staff and parents in a joint examination of the program and collective action towards self improvement before applying for accreditation. Many of the criteria being considered for inclusion in an Australian accreditation system would transfer very easily to schools. Once developed, it would be very interesting to consider applying such a system to school rooms as a self-evaluative tool for the school community.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals in the United States has developed its own standards for quality programs for young children (NAESP 1990), but these remove some of the crucial teacher/child interaction dimensions that characterise the NAEYC standards, in much the same way as the Charter for Teaching proposed in *Australia's Teachers* failed to explicitly acknowledge teachers' need to care for children as part of their teaching task. Australian standards for early childhood programs ought to be able to address the care and education components of high quality programs much more effectively.

Assisting Parents to be Teachers of their Own Children

There are many ways in which schools can recognise and enhance the power of parents to support their child's learning. Successful programs such as the Family Maths Project Australia (FAMPA) have been developed and implemented in some places (Vasey 1990). In addition to these sorts of projects, however, the Australian Parents Council argues that much more remains to be done to ensure that more than lip-service is paid to parents' role as educator (APC 1991). As well as actions that would enhance school/parent relationships and support parents to share the teaching role with teachers, they extend their argument to a view that schools should become involved in providing parenting skills education to parents. While most people agree that parenting education and support systems are vital services for families, and that much more in the way of family support needs to be made available, many would question whether these services are best provided by schools.

Intervention Programs

The Report of the Committee of Review of New South Schools (the Carrick Report 1989) asserted that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children, and are, in fact, their children's most influential teachers. The report argued that much education reform targeted at programs in schools for children six years and upwards was aimed in the wrong direction and ignored what is known about human development. Instead of trying to take over parental responsibilities in schools, governments should re-direct funds to support parents to do their teaching tasks better in the years before the child begins school.

The report recommended that the Education Ministry develop a program similar to the Parents as Teachers Project (PAT) developed in Missouri. This is a cooperative program between the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and four school districts. Its aim is to provide educational guidance and support for parents from the child's birth to three years of age. Not all early childhood experts in the US view school-based intervention programs of this kind favourably, and the project has met with some scepticism from the early childhood profession in this country. While few would argue with the thrust of the Carrick Report's emphasis on the importance of the early years, some would prefer to see parent support programs managed by agencies other than schools, and to see instead greater emphasis on reforming the role of specialist early childhood teachers and advisers *within* schools (Early Childhood Unit undated).

American schools are turning to intervention programs in desperation because of increasingly evident social disintegration in the communities they serve. Many of the problems schools face are caused by acute poverty and hopelessness resulting from an almost complete neglect of social policy programs by successive American governments over a number of years. Education policies need to be firmly linked with policies relating to health, income, housing and employment. If these issues are addressed first, parents are in a much better position to manage their responsibilities as their child's first teacher.

The Role of Schools in Relation to Childcare

As there is a growing consensus that care and education cannot be separated in any meaningful way, some might argue for the creation of combined schools and childcare programs for children zero–eight years of age. Betty Caldwell (1986) argues that schools of today were designed for demographics characteristic of a very different society. In her view, in order for services to be relevant to the needs of today's families, they must provide *both* care and education.

Caldwell was instrumental in developing an experimental primary school program in Arkansas, which, in collaboration with the University of Arkansas established a school with extended hours care programs for children aged six months to twelve years of age. Businesses in the United States have also begun to establish combined work-based childcare and primary schools (Creed 1991).

New Zealand made a start towards fully integrating care and education when childcare was moved to the Education Department in 1986 (O'Rourke 1987). Following this move the early childhood field nearly succeeded in eliminating the divisions between care and education. Unfortunately care and education services remain substantially unequal and separated (May 1991). Many early childhood services find themselves struggling within an unsympathetic education bureaucracy and substantially worse off than before.

The New Zealand Education Department dismantled central specialist early childhood advisory services in favour of regional multidisciplinary teams. The devaluing of the importance of expert knowledge of the early childhood field implicit in this move is very much evident in the Australian education system at the moment. Hence the New Zealand example would appear to be a cautionary tale for those who argue for schools to take on responsibility for childcare services here. Some time in the future this proposition may have more appeal. When schools recognise early childhood and employ early childhood teachers and early childhood advisory personnel, the rest of children's services may look to closer integration with schools with more interest.

Key Principle

- **Because of the New Zealand experience, and because Australia has better developed childcare programs than in the United States, the direct linking of schooling and care seems less desirable for the time being than a conscious commitment within schools to support childcare programs wherever possible.**

The most obvious form of appropriate support from schools is to give as much assistance as possible to out of school hours care (OSHC) programs catering for the school's own pupils. In the Australian Capital Territory, where these programs are licensed, advisers claim to be able to tell which schools have positive attitudes towards programs operating in the school building just by observing the program. Program coordinators confirm that support from the school makes or breaks the program (Gifford 1991).

Many schools that were initially hesitant about sharing premises with OSHC programs have found that a good program becomes an important feature within the school which, when parents can select schools as in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales, becomes a drawcard for attracting new enrolments, and a source of equipment which can be shared within the school community.

The greatest support that school systems could make towards care for school-aged children would be to make school buildings available without charge.

Appropriate Preparation for Teachers Working with Children Aged Five–Eight in Schools

The Nature of the Field of Early Childhood

Early childhood teacher pre-service education, induction, and continuing professional development issues are especially complex because of the multi-faceted nature of early childhood services. In addition to schools, early childhood teachers may work in a wide range of other early childhood settings including preschool programs for children aged three–five and childcare programs of many different kinds catering for children as young as a few weeks of age (Halliwell et al 1989).

Teachers who wish to work with children under three, or to direct childcare centres where babies and toddlers are enrolled, need extensive preparation in the zero–three year age range. Many current courses reflect this need. Those who will be teaching directors also require the skills of a small-business person as well as teaching and supervising skills. Administration and management skills are essential, as the director may be responsible for as many as fifteen other staff members and have an operating budget of several hundred thousand to a million or more dollars annually.

Beginning school teachers, in contrast, have a more manageable range of skills to master, most of which will relate to working effectively in the classroom with children aged five, six or seven and their parents, and to a lesser extent other school staff. It is clear that the pre-service and induction needs of these two kinds of teacher will differ, as may workable models for both.

Current Course Coverage

As presently structured, many early childhood teacher preparation courses attempt to prepare students to work effectively in the full early childhood age range zero–eight and the full range of occupational settings. A few cover the even larger range zero–twelve. Larger institutions have begun to permit students to specialise while sharing a common core of subjects (e.g. the first year in common). Some smaller institutions have narrowed their focus and only offer programs aimed to cover the ages zero–six or three–eight (Tayler 1990).

The Need to Specialise

Many early childhood teacher educators believe that zero–eight is an unrealistic scope for a four-year teacher preparation course (Seefeldt 1988). This is partly because of the profound developmental changes occurring in children over this age range and partly because the settings in which teachers will work are so diverse, as is the nature of the responsibilities required by different settings. The case for specialisation seems to many to be irrefutable on all but practical and economic grounds. These deserve attention to see whether, with the combined determination and commitment of all decision-makers within higher education institutions, school systems and government, appropriate preparation courses for the whole early childhood field cannot be provided.

One possibility would be to integrate programs aimed at preparing teachers to work in schools into mainstream primary courses. This would simplify problems associated with models of teacher preparation which assume an employer structure synonymous with that found in schools. Courses preparing teachers for settings outside schools would be separate, and could develop their own more appropriate models. Experience suggests, however, that the 'early childhood' nature of such programs would rapidly fade. This possibility cannot be recommended.

Optimum arrangements seem to require a common early childhood focus for students preparing to work with children between the ages of zero–eight, with some shared courses but with the requirement to specialise in one of the three areas—zero–three, three–five or five–eight—as has been recommended for American programs by the Early Childhood Teacher Education Commission in the United States and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC 1982).

Objectors to this proposal are concerned that such specialisation would divide the field (or work to ensure its continued division) and would be impractical because of too narrow employment options for graduates. While supporting the need for an early childhood specialisation, the Institute of Family Studies argues that due to the acknowledged spread of multiple intelligences within and between individuals, early childhood courses should prepare teachers to build on individual competencies within the full age range zero–eight (Edgar 1991).

These issues need to be widely debated. Certainly all early childhood education students need significant exposure to the full early childhood age range, and need to be able ultimately to work in any kind of early childhood setting and to recognise and work with individual differences. The very act of specialising in one of the smaller age ranges, however, would give students practice in applying their knowledge in a particular way, and would signal the need to make other adjustments in other settings. The discipline within teaching institutions of developing specialised units for narrower age groups would also contribute substantially to current abilities within the field to make good practice explicit. The sharper focus needed would mean that it would no longer be possible to gloss over issues such as how to work effectively with toddlers.

Another possibility would be a specialisation that helped students work with mixed age groupings. This approach would emphasise cooperative learning within the zero–eight age range, and would give teachers training in how to work with children in family groupings. Demonstration centres might need to be developed initially so that students could gain practical experience and confidence in working in this way.

Sharing Course Components with Other Students

Some argue there is merit in all early childhood students having some shared course work with students studying other disciplines, and in students specialising in school-based teaching having some course work in common with other teachers in training. However, professional subjects, ie those relating to working with children and their families, should be specifically designed for early childhood students, and need to be taught by qualified teachers with substantial, successful experience in the areas being

taught. Many of these subjects would be useful to students in other disciplines, e.g. nurses and upper primary teachers and, as in some places such as the Northern Territory now, students undertaking associate diploma courses in childcare.

Issues in Relation to Course Content

The same debate over course content occurs in relation to early childhood courses as is raging in other areas of teacher preparation. This concerns the balance between professional subjects aimed at giving the student the specific skills and knowledge needed to be ready to face a classroom at the end of the course, and more general subjects designed to give the beginning teacher the basis for developing truly independent, professional judgement over the course of a career in teaching. The difficulty is that beginning teachers need both.

Pressure to reduce the field practice components of courses escalated during the 1980s, due to the high cost of field supervisor payments (Ebbeck 1989). A survey of compulsory field experience days in early childhood courses conducted in 1988 revealed a range of seventy-three to 120 days, with an average of closer to eighty. Tayler's 1990 review of early childhood courses showed a similar pattern (Tayler 1990).

Employers in the field of early childhood are increasingly concerned at the poor preparation in practical skills graduates appear to be receiving from many early childhood courses. Current moves by government to negotiate the abandonment of supervisory payments in schools as part of award restructuring in teaching awards are especially problematic in the early childhood sector, where many different employers and awards are implicated. Solutions to the question of the practicum need to be specifically addressed for the early childhood field.

Minimum Early Childhood Course Content

There appears to be widespread consensus that there should not be a single, uniform approach to pre-service courses in early childhood in Australia. There are still significant State-based differences in employment opportunities arising from different children's services regulations and education department policies. Institutions serving rural and isolated populations argue that they have different needs (Battersby & Sparrow 1990; McDonald 1990). Institutions themselves will operate within different constraints, making different solutions necessary. There is also the compelling argument that there is never one best way.

There is a growing view, however, that agreed minimum standards for course content are now crucial. For discussion purposes only, the following suggestions are offered as a starting point. Widespread consultation would be needed before any statement could be viewed as sensible or workable. This paper suggests that, as a starting point only, the following standards be considered.

Draft Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Courses

- All early childhood courses should give students a sound understanding of children aged zero–eight and their families, and practical knowledge of the services designed for this age range.
- Early childhood students should receive specialised training in one of the following areas: zero–three, three–five, five–eight.
- Courses should provide a broadly based grounding in liberal studies, to include arts, humanities, social, physical and behavioural sciences.
- Students should encounter studies designed to contribute to their personal development and capacity to think critically and reflectively about the contexts influencing their values, attitudes and behaviours. These should include interpersonal communication studies, the expressive arts and a choice of study requiring a shift of perspective (e.g. the history of science, feminist theory, black history, etc).
- Students should have supervised practical experience in two of the three specialisation areas. Overall, they should have a minimum of 100 days of field experience, which should include observation visits to a range of services catering for children in the age range zero–eight. A minimum of one quarter of the field experience should be with the age group of the specialisation.
- Students should have practical experiences interspersed with theoretical study throughout the course.
- Curriculum studies should support developmentally appropriate practice within the area of specialisation.
- Students should be offered an integrated and inter disciplinary understanding of learning theory and practice.
- Students should receive a grounding in the principles and methods of working with young children in the age range zero–eight, but should receive special guidance in applying general techniques to the age group of their specialisation.
- Students should receive instruction and practice in observation techniques and workable methods of record keeping.
- Students should pursue an area of their own choosing in depth.

Entry pre-requisites:	Year 12 English, mathematics, science
Staffing requirements:	all subjects need to be taught by staff with expertise and substantial, successful experience in the areas being taught. This requirement applies to supervisory staff supporting all practical experiences.
Articulation requirements:	every effort should be made to ensure that early childhood courses articulate with related courses, including postgraduate courses, which taken as a whole offer multiple entry and exit points for the full range of personnel working in the early childhood field.

Induction and Further Training

Induction

Better methods of inducting beginning early childhood teachers into the workplace need to be considered. Among the challenges for the field in doing this will be the need to resolve the impact of having different approaches to induction operating inside and outside school settings, should these emerge.

If schools begin to trial different methods of inducting teachers, as has been recommended, the early childhood field needs to give careful consideration to how other children's services outside schools could adopt (or adapt) some of the same methods, perhaps through the use of regional early childhood personnel to support beginning teachers in more direct ways than now occurs.

Continuing Professional Development through In-service Education and Advisory Support

It is now well recognised that a pre-service course cannot by itself fully prepare a teacher for a career in teaching. Provision for ongoing professional development is necessary for at least three different purposes: providing particular skills and knowledge at a point at which their relevance can be recognised and the skills themselves can be directly applied, bringing the practising teacher up-to-date with new methods and insights, and renewing energy and enthusiasm for teaching.

Key Principle

- **In-service courses should be accredited, and wherever possible, should give teachers advanced standing in recognised advanced studies. In-service courses for early childhood teachers should be provided by personnel with expertise in early childhood education.**
- **Teachers also need on-going personal advisory support if they are to work optimally, especially if they are trying to use developmentally appropriate practice within a more traditional, subject-oriented primary school. Advisory personnel need to have specialised expertise in early childhood programs.**

The Appropriate Links between Early Childhood in Schools and the Rest of the Early Childhood Field

Many advocates of early childhood education argue for much closer links between all early childhood services including programs offered by teachers in the first years of school. Genuine integration will require much change to occur in breaking down the old but still very much alive distinctions between care and education. These are nowhere more clearly drawn than in the industrial arena where working conditions and pay for early childhood personnel differ widely according to whether the work is designated 'care' or 'education'. Much higher status, as well as greater monetary reward and shorter working hours, still separate educators from carers and will continue to do so, despite any amount of rhetoric and good will to make it different, until industrial treatment is rationalised.

Industrial Concerns

Award Coverage within the Early Childhood Field

The industrial chaos within the children's services field has been thoroughly documented by Brennan and O'Donnell (1986) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in their evidence to the recent test case for the childcare industry. Childcare personnel are gradually receiving common award coverage under the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union, but teachers and nurses working in childcare programs still have industrial links with schools and hospitals respectively in some states. Teachers in childcare have no effective cover in other States and Territories.

Questions of how early childhood workers are best represented get caught up in concerns about demarcation disputes between unions. Resolution of the issues will require sensitivity to union concerns, as well as perseverance to work through the problems in the interests of improving programs for children.

What, then, ought to be the nature of professional and industrial links between early childhood teachers in schools and their counterparts in other children's services? Such questions may involve more than pay rates if the tripartite approach to policy development takes hold in a major way. Unless early childhood teachers in school manage to link in with the voices of their colleagues in other early childhood programs, they are likely to continue to be unheard or out-voted in the forums of the large teacher unions.

Competency Standards

Competency standards are being introduced into industry as part of a wider program of industry reform. The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector has already embarked on this approach to training, even though very few industries have yet registered their competency standards. Unless there is a change in national policy, child care competency standards will eventually be developed, possibly by a Community Services Industry Training Advisory Board.

Whether there will be competency standards for teachers is less clear. Some professional bodies have agreed to develop standards for their profession (Gonczi, Hager & Oliver 1990). Competency standards at professional level are also being incorporated into industrial awards as part of award restructuring. It is perhaps through this latter mechanism that standards will be developed for teachers in schools.

Much of the debate over competency-based standards for higher level workers concerns whether it is possible to capture the essence of advanced skills—thinking, judgement, problem solving and context-bound application of knowledge and decision-making in the concrete, measurable terms required of competency-based standards (Elliott 1990). Those who have already been through a similar 'revolution' in the US and Canada some years ago, now abandoned, believe the competency-based approach cannot deliver all it promises, though some believe the attempt to develop standards is itself a worthwhile exercise (Brian Stanford, Director, Adelaide College of TAFE, personal communication). Others argue that the approach will result in a de-skilling of the workforce (Brown 1991).

Strong concern has been expressed within the education community over the new language being used by this training revolution, and its alienation from traditional education values. It will be important for educationists to try to separate simple prejudices from more valid concerns in shaping their response to push for reforms to education and training. It will be particularly problematic for the early childhood field if a major wedge were to be driven between those with qualifications in childcare obtained through TAFE and those with other qualifications obtained from degree courses in child care/early childhood education as a consequence of the development of competency-based standards and training up to but not including the professional level.

There are a number of promises for the early childhood field in the move to competency-based standards, especially if they can be developed coherently for the field as a whole, including early childhood teachers in schools. The identification of competencies could put to rest forever old dichotomies between care and education, and provide the basis for parity of esteem and pay among early childhood workers which until now has eluded the field. The common competencies in all early childhood programs would finally be apparent, along with their close nexus with those of other professionals, whether the competencies were technically identified as belonging to teachers or childcare workers, and regardless of setting.

But there are serious questions to be addressed before the field can be confident that the introduction of competencies would be positive rather than detrimental. Could the introduction of competencies result in a loss of flexibility, richness and quality in programs? Could their use give management unprecedented control over previously independent, autonomous workers? If competencies were developed solely by parties to industrial awards, and if unions capitulated to the introduction of unsatisfactory competency-based assessment procedures in the interests of achieving pay increases, much damage could be wrought through their introduction.

If competency standards are to be developed for teachers, experience from other fields suggests that it will be important that practicing teachers and parent groups are closely involved with their development, if they are to have any hope of working effectively.

McRae (1991) makes a case for the development of some form of ongoing quality assurance program of appraisal for the teaching profession, arguing that nowhere else are either professionals or workers shielded in the way teachers now are. If competency standards were to be used in conjunction with assessment of individual performance of classroom teachers, as now appears the intention, the close involvement of teachers with early childhood expertise in constructing and assessing standards would be essential.

Key Principle

- **Any move to introduce competency standards into schools should be subject to open processes of scrutiny and debate. If competency standards are to be developed for early childhood teachers in schools, practicing classroom teachers and parents should participate in their development, and efforts should be made to link the competencies identified with those to be developed for the rest of the early childhood field.**

The Question of Competency-based Training at the Tertiary Level

If competency standards are developed for early childhood teachers, then many would argue that teacher preparation at the tertiary level should be delivered in competency-based modules so as to articulate optimally with other training programs in the early childhood field, particularly the certificate and associate diploma in child care, and to guarantee the nexus between teacher preparation and the needs of the early childhood 'industry.' There is still considerable ambivalence about this, however. It is interesting to note that American educators who have had experience with earlier forms of competency-based training rejected the proposal that the NAEYC teacher education guidelines be stated in competency-based terms. Many commented that competency-based teacher education programs tended to be technically rather than theoretically based (Seefeldt 1988).

Early Childhood Issues and School Systems

Some of the issues raised in this paper can be dealt with by individual teachers and parents. Others require support from individual school principals and other staff within the school in cooperation with parent bodies. A few, however, require changes in systems policy if they are to be resolved. The most important of these is the need to re-establish a policy of employing teachers with specialist early childhood training to work with young children in schools.

Whereas every State once recognised the need for specialist knowledge to work effectively with this age range, all Australian education systems have since adopted a policy of the single primary school, mostly K–6, in which teachers are expected to be able to teach any age group, regardless of specialisation during pre-service training.

Key Principle:

- **Education Departments need to re-instate the special identity of early childhood classes in schools and begin to document their characteristics.**

Without a policy of special identity for early childhood classes, the information needed to adequately describe even basic features of these classes in schools is simply not available. Education Departments do not know how many early childhood teachers are teaching in the system, or what age children they are teaching.

Before national data can be collected, **an agreed system of early childhood nomenclature needs to be adopted**. Surveys sponsored by the Australian College of Education in conjunction with the Schools Council, the University of Queensland and Griffith University (Logan et al 1990) ought to give a national picture of early childhood staffing in schools. Methodological problems associated with the lack of a national vocabulary for the early childhood field, however, prevent the data from being interpreted with confidence (Logan, personal communication). It is very much to be hoped that the next time this survey is run, national definitions such as those proposed in this paper are used.

Even with the ambiguities, it can be stated that relatively few early childhood teachers are working in primary schools and many primary-trained teachers are working in early childhood classes.

Key Principle:

- **Any proposal to give preferential employment in early childhood programs to teachers with early childhood training needs to be implemented in ways that do not disadvantage the existing teaching force**. There are at present insufficient early childhood teachers to staff these classrooms in any case. Future staffing appointments, however, should be aimed at recognising the importance of early childhood training. **When vacancies occur, early childhood graduates should be sought from now on, and steps should be put in train to increase the proportion of early childhood graduates from teacher training institutions.**

This recognition of the particular needs of young children in schools for teachers with early childhood training need not interfere with promotions opportunities for such teachers. There is no reason why an early childhood teacher should not be eligible for any promotion position within a school or system. They should also be able to teach in Years 3–6 if this is their preference. Closer links with other early childhood services would also open up other career paths for teachers who preferred to advance within an early childhood field.

Systems should also reinstate specialist early childhood advisory and management positions in both their central and regional structures. The loss of early childhood expertise from education support structures is part of a larger trend away from central control of schools to school-based management. It is vital that in the move towards devolution the capacity of systems to support good practice in schools is not completely lost.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has examined briefly a large range of issues of relevance to the early childhood years (K–2) in schools.

The paper asserts that children aged five–eight are sufficiently unlike older children to need educational programs that have been designed specifically for them and that are taught by teachers who have been trained to work with young children.

While it is true that the style of teaching throughout primary school has gradually loosened and come closer to an approach into which younger children can be 'fitted', many State education departments have felt the need to issue directives, policies and in-service courses in an attempt to encourage primary-trained teachers to adopt developmentally appropriate practice with their youngest children.

These policy guidelines are important, but they need to be accompanied by preferential employment of appropriately trained teachers.

The paper also examines the issue of what should constitute appropriate preparation for early childhood personnel. The proposal in the paper is offered as a starting point for what needs to be wide-ranging discussion. It is proposed that early childhood courses should be largely separate from primary and secondary teacher education courses because the organising feature of early childhood courses—the child and the family does not fit with the disciplines-centred orientation of other teacher education courses. The paper also proposes that early childhood preparation needs to be more specific than zero–eight. All courses should cover this range, but within the course offer a narrower specialisation.

The loss of specific promotions positions in schools, advisory and administrative positions in school systems and decision making positions within universities for staff with early childhood expertise makes improvement in the status quo difficult. There is at present little 'voice' or strong advocacy for early education in schools. Given the range and importance of areas in which change is underway or being contemplated, it will be particularly important for the early childhood field as a whole to find its voice and to advocate jointly for good practice in early childhood programs for all children aged zero–eight.

Australia has expertise in early childhood education and a developing children's services field that is among the best in the world. The knowledge that underpins the effectiveness of early childhood programs has been gained through the cumulative experience of many hundreds of early childhood educators working with young children and passing their knowledge on to students. New theories of child development and the teaching/learning process have modified practice, but the core of the field's focus on children has remained. It is crucial now that the essential elements of early childhood education are identified and articulated clearly. Given the combined thrust of current conditions and forces within education, without this public and comprehensible defence of early childhood principles, the early childhood knowledge base is apt to be diluted and/or distorted, with few outside the field noticing or understanding the loss.

National and State/Territory data needs to be collected on the number of early childhood teachers already working in schools, showing how many are working with children aged five–eight, and the number working in promotions positions.

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Early Childhood Education Systems by State

Australian Capital Territory

Children are entitled to twelve months of sessional *preschool* before starting school, administered by the ACT Education Department and used by many child care programs. Other child care programs employ their own preschool teachers. Some community-based preschools offer flexible, extended hours programs and charge fees. *Kindergarten* is the first non-compulsory year of primary school. One intake means that children must turn five by 30 April. There are seven years of full-day primary schooling. The system does not give any formal recognition to early childhood classes within primary schools, and there are no restrictions on staffing. Only early childhood trained teachers may teach in preschools, however.

New South Wales

Children are offered diverse *preschool/kindergarten* choices in New South Wales, but there is no policy of universal entitlement. The largest number of preschool places are in community-based preschools where parents are often involved in the management of the services and where all parents pay fees. Most operate for six hours a day and some offer full day sessions. Most long day care centres have trained early childhood teachers and offer an educational program. Some primary schools have preschools attached to them. These are administered by the Department of School Education and parents pay minimum fees. Primary education in New South Wales refers to seven years of school: *Kindergarten* and *Years 1–6*. Children may enter kindergarten at four years six months. Teachers are expected to be able to teach at any level within K–6. A few separate infant schools (K–2) remain.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Department of Education offers sessional *preschool* to four year olds. Most preschools are located on school grounds and are administratively linked to their primary school. After their fifth birthday, children may enter *transition* classes, then progress to *Years 1 and 2*.

Queensland

Children are entitled to twelve months of sessional *preschool* education within Education Department programs if they are four years of age by January 1 of that year. The non-government school sector also provides preschools for four year olds. Sessional *kindergarten* programs provided by community associations are also available and are widely used by children three–five years of age. Many community kindergartens offer five and a half hour sessions on a fee basis. State preschools have shorter sessions and are free. Many child care services use preschool programs to supplement their own.

There is no kindergarten year in school. The state school system admits children into *Year 1* if they are five years of age by January 1 of that year but schooling is compulsory the following year. Children aged five–eight progress through Years 1, 2 and 3 of the school system, giving six years of full-day primary schooling. This results in an average exit age of sixteen–seventeen years at the end of the twelve years of schooling.

South Australia

Children aged four are entitled to one year of sessional *preschool* before commencing school. Most preschools are run by the Children's Services Office where they are referred to as kindergartens. Others are Education Department Child Parent Centres. A smaller number are affiliate kindergartens, integrated programs or are run by the Catholic Education Office. The first year of primary school is called *Reception*. This is followed by compulsory *Years 1–7*. Reception classes are primarily for five year olds, and most enter at this age. Although the national trend towards K–7 primary schools is evident in SA, there are still some junior primary schools (R–2) which attract the same leadership positions as Years 3–7 and R–7 schools.

Tasmania

Primary education in Tasmania includes sessional *kindergarten*, full-day *preparatory grade* and *Grades 1–6*. Compulsory schooling begins in Grade 1. Children normally enter kindergarten if they have turned four by the first of January. Some children miss the preparatory grade due to their birthdates. All state funded kindergartens are directly administered by the Education Department and the majority are linked with larger primary schools. Attendance patterns vary according to local community need. Kindergtarten to Grade 2 classes are referred to as 'early childhood education' classes. A few infant schools remain, but are under pressure to amalgamate with adjacent primary schools.

Victoria

Children are entitled to one year of sessional *kindergarten/preschool* prior to commencing school with partial funding coming from the Office of Preschool and Child Care. Local government is a major provider of services, as are churches and other community groups. The first non-compulsory year of primary school is called the *preparatory year*. As in New South Wales, children may be as young as four years six months when they enter school. Preparatory is followed by *Years 1 and 2*. Altogether the system provides seven years of full-day primary schooling. Primary schools are now all Years P–6. There are no specific promotions or advisory positions set aside for teachers with expertise in junior primary teaching and teachers are required by the system to be able to teach in the full range, Years P–6.

Western Australia

The educational arrangements for four and five year old children in Western Australia are complex and in transition. Community services provide sessional *preschool* programs for four and five year olds. Salary costs are met by the Ministry of Education and they come under the jurisdiction of district superintendents. Increasingly the State Education Department is taking full responsibility for preschools. Government sessional

preprimary programs are offered to five year olds, and sometimes four year olds. These are mostly located on the primary school site or nearby and are administered by the school principal and staffed by an early childhood teacher and an untrained aide. *Year 1* is the first compulsory year of school. All children enter in January, and either are six or will turn six during the year. With rare exceptions, Year 1 is staffed by primary teachers. As in Queensland, the public system provides six years of full-day primary schooling. A few junior primary schools (K–2) are still found in Perth. Once called infant schools, junior schools are now under pressure to amalgamate with larger primary schools.

Terms for Early Childhood Education in Australia

	Usual Age of Child			
	4 years	*5 years*	*6 years*	*7 years*
ACT	preschool	kindergarten	Year 1	Year 2
NSW	p'school/k'garten	kindergarten	Year 1	Year 2
NT	preschool	transition	Year 1	Year 2
Qld	p'school/k'garten	Year 1	Year 2	
SA	p'school/k'garten	reception	Year 1	Year 2
Tas	kindergarten	prep	Grade 1	Grade 2
Vic	p'school/k'garten	prep	Year 1	Year 2
WA	preschool	pre/primary	Year 1	Year 2

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